liable to be condemned as Jacobins or radicals. Percival, though politically the most moderate of Whigs, did not escape this censure.

Percival's Character

Percival's supposed radicalism was alluded to in one of the few accounts of him by someone outside the medical profession. In his *Autobiography*, Thomas de Quincey wrote that Dr Percival:

> was a literary man of elegant tastes and philosophical habits. He had been a favoured correspondent of the most eminent Frenchmen at that time, who cultivated literature jointly with philosophy. Voltaire, Diderot, Maupertuis, Condorcet, with D'Alembert, had all treated him with distinction; and I have heard my mother say that, in days before I or my sister could have known him, he attempted vainly to interest her in these French luminaries by reading extracts of their frequent letters which, however, so far from reconciling her to the letters or to the writers of the letters, had the unhappy effect of rivetting her dislike (previously budding) to the doctor, as their receiver, and the *proneur* of their authors. The tone of the letters, hollow, insincere, and full of courtly civilities to Dr Percival as a known friend of the 'tolerance' certainly was not adapted to the English taste; and in this respect was specially offensive to my mother, as always assuming of the doctor, that by mere necessity of being a philosopher, he must be an infidel.[100]

Percival himself never spoke of his religious opinions, according to De Quincey who, as a child, had attracted the doctor's attention and who liked him.

Percival's character traits are delineated at greater length in his son's *Memoirs*. These and the accounts given of him in the autobiographical writings of his colleagues and friends stress those qualities which made him a valuable mediator. His son sketched his social character and portrayed him as the embodiment of the virtue of candour.

> His skill in conducting rational and polite conversation was among the most conspicuous of his accomplishments. The tranquil facility of his discourse rendered it peculiarly agreeable to his hearers, and left them at liberty to admire the graces of elegance and perspicuity. Exempt alike from the pedantry of the declaimer, the man of fashion, or the student, he neither sought 'to dazzle with a luxury of light' nor studied to disguise the real merit or value of his opinions.[101]

Percival's social skills may have owed some of their quality to the fact that he had the good fortune not to be entirely confined to the social and intellectual structures of a small provincial town:

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> The society of Dr Percival was frequently diversified by the visits of strangers and foreigners of distinction, who came to indulge their curiosity in viewing the manufactures and the town of Manchester. His extensive correspondence with men of eminence in various departments was one cause of the frequency of these introductions; and doubtless his own fame, and his undisputed rank in the town where he resided, contributed to the same circumstance. These strangers were on all occasions received by him with polite and liberal hospitality; while their visits afforded him the opportunity, which in remote provincial parts is eagerly embraced, of listening to the history and proceedings of foreign countries.[102]

These brief excerpts are typical of a rich and extensive material which identifies Percival as a type of medical character. Although his son was a far from disinterested spectator, he was confident that he had supported his biography with sufficient independent evidence from testimonials, correspondence, and memorials. But more than anything else, Percival's own *Medical Ethics* would, he hoped, demonstrate his father's ideal character. By 'tracing with his own hand, what sort of a character a physician ought to be', Dr Percival had in that work 'also drawn a portrait of himself'.

While Percival was a medical type, he was not exactly typical. He was neither a part of the medical élite nor was he ever admitted to the Royal College of Physicians. To some contemporaries he was, as Mrs de Quincey's comments indicate, an upstart of dubious religion and politics and certainly tainted by his association with such men as Price and Priestley. To others he was a respected scientist and man of letters. In whatever light his immediate contemporaries saw him, it is clear from hindsight that as a professional man he was a prototype of the doctor who in the following generation began to change the face of medical practice in Britain.[103]

Middlemarch *and Manchester*

The medical biography we depend on for much of the details of Percival's life, character, and career is at bottom a story of medical progress, of the inevitable motion of medicine toward its own perfection. Some balance of judgement may be achieved if we attend briefly to an extraordinary account of the opposite, the seemingly intractable conservatism of the medical profession. In *Middlemarch,* George Eliot created an instructive fictional counterpart to Percival and his successful career in Manchester. Her character, Dr Tertius Lydgate, was also an Edinburgh graduate (*circa* 1829). Like Percival he had studied on the Continent, in Paris, and

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